



The Academy of the Arts Museum of Objects

**SCHOOL OF VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS
UNIVERSITY OF TASMANIA
LAUNCESTON**

Ceramics: Material and Materiality

Ceramic Studio Exhibition Project

November 2007 – January 2008

Exhibition curators: Professor Vincent McGrath
Sonja Brough

Ceramics: Material and Materiality

In the late nineteen eighties American ceramic artist Rick Dillingham put a new twist on the creation and reading of clay vessels. Dillingham worked as a restorer of pre-historic Indian ceramic pots at the Museum of New Mexico, Laboratory of Anthropology in New Mexico, USA. Over time he became absorbed by the way ceramic shards communicate interrupted narratives, calling upon the viewer to fill in the spaces and imagine the whole artefact and its surface imagery as it might have been in the past. This sensory process was as much an intellectual challenge as it was a physical retrieval and reconstruction of ceramic vessels. As a restorer Dillingham's task was to rebuild the pot from found shards so that it might be visualised in its physical form not that much different to the time it was in use by Indian communities.

I would contend that first and foremost many of us look at restored pots and other forms of ceramics from the perspective of their completeness, as entities in their own right, composed or designed within a specific setting. Then, subsequently, we might go on to examine the work with other considerations in mind such as surface quality, pattern and texture, colour, profile and scale. In his own ceramic studio practice Rick Dillingham used the experience of being a restorer to cultivate the idea of the pottery shard as a work in its own right. The shard was not necessarily a piece of a bigger narrative requiring the entire pot to comprehend its meaning. Dillingham's pots are modern-day works that are not brought back from a deep history but rather are vessels reconstructed from shards carrying an array of possible interpretations. Instead of reconstructing a pot as a restorer might do in piecing together one narrative of the past, Dillingham's studio work is an attempt to deconstruct the original form by purposely breaking it into shards and then re-conceptualising its surface in material processes and content. From here the vessel form is rebuilt by carefully piecing together the shards with their altered imagery and surfaces.

Hard-fired ceramic shards have always fascinated scholars and artists because they give tantalising clues to the past. This is especially so in relation to social, cultural and technological perspectives. A ceramic shard's ability to remain relatively impervious to the weathering action of seawater, wind, frost, fire and dampness over thousands of years allows us to read it in ways other community remnants such as metal, paper and textile often cannot provide the archaeologist.

Therefore one of the great inherent qualities of clay is that it can be vitrified and made a non-reducible material. In its vitrified state of ceramic, clay can be used for load bearing architectural structures and also used to create miniature objects for scientific and artistic purposes. Moist clay is amorphous and can be shaped by hand or machine. Importantly, clay possesses a unique ability in that it can be formed in additive and subtractive processes. In the hands of the skilled practitioner these attributes can be exploited to reveal the physical characteristics that the material possesses. However, the creative use of clay in respect of surface, colour, scale and mass is, in itself, a technical quality. To genuinely appreciate the materiality of clay one needs to locate it in the context of the ceramic object, its cultural purpose and the space and time where it is perceived. Some archaeologists and theorists would consider this conjunction, the fluxing of material and social conditions, as the only way to evaluate and understand either idea.

From the contemporary ceramic maker's perspective, the idea is artistically expressed within and outside the material nature of clay. While there is an interesting language that clay brings to the making and appreciation of the ceramic object, ultimately it is its 'thingness', its perceived meaning and existence in the circulatory flows of the world that determine its value. So, like the archaeologist who digs up a fine ceramic shard and speculates its past, he does so from the view of this time in the knowledge that the broken clay narrative, conceived in another time, is now in this life influenced by all that surrounds it. Rick Dillingham's modern-day re-constructed vessels from ceramic shards capture all the allure of the material properties of clay. More significantly, though, they attempt to converge the ideas surrounding the past and this moment in making sense of the contemporary ceramic artefact.

List of Works

Sonja BROUGH, Piece 1, Clay, Dimensions variable, 2007

Sonja BROUGH, Piece 2, Clay, Dimensions variable, 2007

Sonja BROUGH, Piece 3, Clay, Dimensions variable, 2007

Tim CHATWIN, Sign of Bigger Things, Unprocessed clay & plastic containers, 40 x 17 x 11cm, 2007

Philip COOMBE, Untitled, Ceramics, Dimensions variable 2007

Peter DAVY, Figure 1, Raku clay, Dimensions variable, 2007

Peter DAVY, Figure 2, Raku clay, Dimensions variable, 2007

Peter DAVY, Figure 3, Raku clay, Dimensions variable, 2007

Zsolt FALUDI, Inconsolable Weeping: What is it? Can it be True that it is Death? Bag of clay, electric drop-saw & plastic, 46 x 40 x 53cm, 2007

Beata GLIGA, Slow Again, Clay, Dimensions variable, 2007

Beata GLIGA, Finally Here, Clay, Dimensions variable, 2007

Beata GLIGA, Oh its Time..., Clay, Dimensions variable, 2007

Christine HANNAN, Still Life 1, Southern Ice Porcelain, Dimensions variable, 2007

Christine HANNAN, Still Life 2, Southern Ice Porcelain, Dimensions variable, 2007

Christine HANNAN, Still Life 3, Southern Ice Porcelain, Dimensions variable, 2007

Moh-sin HEAH, Tea Cups, Stoneware, Dimensions variable, 2007

Dr Wayne Z Hudson, Sitting Pretty, Cowhide, clay & bronze, 5 x 40 x 18cm, 2007

Dr Wayne Z Hudson, Appendage Y, Leather & clay, 5 x 40 x 18cm, 2007

Dr Wayne Z Hudson, Appendage Z, Kangaroo hide & clay, 4 x 40 x 9cm, 2007

Debbie McGrath, Thirty-five Pots, Terracotta, 48 x 48cm, 2007

Vincent McGrath, Plate, Clay, 35 x 35 x 35cm, 2007

Vincent McGrath, Knife & Spoon, Clay, 10 x 10 x 2cm, 2007

Vincent McGrath, Cup, Clay, 15 x 7 x 4cm, 2007

Tess STEVENS, Pod Test 1, Ceramics, Dimensions variable, 2007

Tess STEVENS, Pod Test 2, Ceramics, Dimensions variable, 2007

Tess STEVENS, Pod Test 3 Ceramics, Dimensions variable, 2007

Jo THOROLD, Sticky Earth, Raw Black Clay, Dimensions variable, 2007

Ev WILLIAMS, From where it all began, Ceramic, 20 x 10cm, 2007

Ev WILLIAMS, From where it all began, Ceramic, 20 x 10cm, 2007



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